

Organic Food Consumption among Urban Consumers in Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The trend of organic food consumption is expanding among people. There is a necessity to study what really persuades consumers to turn towards organic food. In this regards a study was conducted to identify the organic food consumption pattern among the consumers in three urban areas in Batticaloa district, Sri Lanka namely Manmunai North, Kattankudy and Eravur Town. The study also focused on the influential effect of consumer perception and consumer motivation related to organic food consumption and investigates the factors that limit the consumption of organic foods. The research was based on primary and secondary data sources. The study was conducted among randomly chosen hundred urban consumers in Batticaloa district. Individual interviews involving questionnaire survey were conducted in each urban council among the consumers at food purchasing places. The study employed descriptive statistics, coefficient of correlation and the regression to analyse the resulting data. The study predicts that organic food consumption has significant relationship with total knowledge, consumer perception, consumer motivation, product related factors, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, number of household members and monthly income. The prominent motivating factors to purchase organic foods include environmental concern, health concern, safety, product quality and trust. Conversely, trust, price, accessibility, assortment, shelf life, taste, and lack of time to look for organic food are the main factors that limit the consumption of organic foods in the study area.

Key words: consumer motivation, consumer perception, environmental consciousness, health consciousness, purchase intension

INTRODUCTION

A structural change in the consumer's choice of food has been observed over the past years. Many of the consumers have started to consume organic food as it is considered as eco-friendly and healthier. Consumers have shifted their food habits from traditionally grown foods to organic food [1]. Further, production and consumption of organic food was very popular in developed nations in the earlier period and presently it is getting popular among the developing countries [2]. Around one third of the organic production is carried out in the developing countries [3]. It was highlighted by scholars that there is a growing trend in organic food consumption among the urban consumers around the world. And they consume more organic food than consumers in rural areas [4]. As the organic food consumption is fairly a new concept to developing countries including Sri Lanka, it would be interesting to study about the organic food consumption among the urban consumers in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the present study attempts to understand and identify the organic food consumption pattern among the urban consumers in Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from 100 randomly selected respondents from three urban areas in Batticaloa district by using self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire was pre-tested and few revisions were made. Data were collected at different food purchasing places in the urban areas of Batticaloa district. The questionnaire used for the study consisted of three main parts; i) One close-ended portion of a questionnaire was designed to collect data relevant to the demographic characteristics of the population ii) another close-ended portion was designed by adopting variables from relevant literature. Items were measured using a 5 point-Likert scale, where point 5 represents a positive response (strongly agree) and point 1 represents a negative response (strongly disagree). The questionnaire variables and their sources of adoption are shown in Table 1. iii) the third portion of the questionnaire contains an open-ended question "what are the major barriers you face in organic food purchase and consumption?". The data obtained were analysed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. Frequency and relational (correlation and regression) analyses were used to interpret the results of the study.

Table 1: Number of variables used and source of adoption

Variables	Item used	Adopted from
Organic food consumption	12 statements	[5], [6], [7]
Purchase intention	13 statements	[8], [5], [9], [10]
Consumer perception	11 statements	[11], [10], [12], [13]
Consumer motivation	13 statements	[14], [15], [16]
Consumer barriers	13 statements	[17], [7]
Health consciousness	5 statements	[5], [18]
Environmental consciousness	4 statements	[19], [20], [21]
Consumer knowledge	7 statements	[22]

Table 2: Demographic composition of respondents

Demographic Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	61	61.0
Female	39	39.0
Age		
20-39 years	57	57.0
40-59 years	31	31.0
60 years & above	12	12.0
Monthly income		
Below Rs.10,000	07	7.0
Rs.10,001 - 30,000	43	43.0
Rs.30,001 - 50,000	31	31.0
Rs.50,001 - 70,000	13	13.0
Above Rs.70,000	06	6.0
Educational level		
Primary education	15	15.0
Secondary education	55	55.0
Tertiary education	30	30.0
Employment status		
Working full time	69	69.0
Retired	10	10.0
Student	08	8.0
House wife	12	12.0
Unemployed	01	1.0
Household size		
1-2 members	10	10.0
3-4 members	48	48.0
5-6 members	36	36.0
Above 6 members	06	6.0

Table 3: Results of correlation analysis between organic food consumption and selected independent variables

	Organic food consumption	
	Pearson correlation	Significance
Total knowledge	.481**	0.000
Consumer perception	.770**	0.000
Consumer motivation	.881**	0.000
Product related factors	.512**	0.000
Health consciousness	.329**	0.001
Environmental consciousness	.402**	0.000
Number of household members	-.239*	0.017
Monthly family income	.204*	0.047
Age of the respondent	.107 ^{NS}	0.288

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability

^{NS} Non significance * Significant at 0.05 level of probability

Table 4: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	Organic Food consumption	
	Regression co-efficient (‘b’ value)	‘t’ value
Total consumer motivation	.867	17.248**
Age	-.031	-1.283 ^{NS}
Monthly income	3.746E-6	1.118 ^{NS}
Household members	-.541	-2.121*
	R ² = 0.797 F = 88.595	

**significant at 0.01 level of probability

*significant at 0.05 level of probability ^{NS} Non-significant

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic composition of the respondents is shown in Table 2.

Information sources used for food safety and nutritional updates

The respondents were asked to choose the sources from which they get their food safety and nutritional updates from. A list of 08 kinds of answers was given to the respondents. The list included local TV news, radio, newspaper, published book, leaflet, friends & relatives, internet websites and doctors. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents (52%) said friends and relatives are the main source to get food safety and nutritional updates. In addition, few percentages of the consumers were also getting nutritional updates equally from local TV news (12%) and combination of local TV news & friends and relatives (12%).

Barriers to organic food consumption

The dominated barriers for the consumers in the urban areas of Batticaloa district were the accessibility of organic food in the market and trust towards the organic foods. Another study carried out in the past indicates that accessibility and convenience of purchasing were considered to be the important factors in organic food purchasing [23]. Further, another research result highlights that lack of demand and consumption among a particular group of people in Canada obtained because of high degree of mistrust towards organic food products [24].

Lack of time for look after the organic food is another barrier in the study area. The same result was obtained in a study where around 35% of the studied population in Canada find hard to look for organic food [25]. Price of the product was also

considered as one of the barriers for organic food consumption. High price of organic food considered as a major barrier for most of the people to keep them away from consumption of organic food [23], [26], [25], [15], & [4].

Factor Analysis

Relationship between selected independent variables and organic food consumption among the urban consumers in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

Correlation analysis was done to measure how well two sets of data correlates with each other. The co-efficient of correlation of each tested variable with organic food consumption is shown in Table 3.

The results showed that total knowledge of the consumers, consumer motivation, consumer's perception, product related factors, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, and monthly income of the consumers were positively and significantly correlated with organic food consumption, whereas family size negatively and significantly correlated with organic food consumption. On the other hand, age of the respondents failed to show any significant relationship with organic food consumption.

Knowledge of the consumers significantly influenced the organic food consumption pattern of the urban consumers in the Batticaloa district. This result is further validated by the findings of past studies where it was stated that frequent organic food consumers on many countries are highly educated than occasional and non-organic food buyers [4] & [15]. Further, another finding indicated that better knowledge of the product observed in highly educated people [26]. Moreover, better knowledge of the product could lead to increased consumption of organic food since it

connected with awareness and product purchasing [27].

With respect of consumer perception, the results show a positive and significant relationship with organic food consumption. Consumers with positive perception towards the organic food tend to have frequent organic food consumption. There are plenty of research results indicated that there is a positive correlation between consumer perception and organic food consumption, more specifically functional and individual value perceptions highly correlated with organic food consumption [28], [29], [30] & [31].

Consumer motivation showed a positive significant relationship with organic food consumption. A vast number of literatures demonstrated about the positive relationship between the consumer motivation and attitudes toward organic food which in turn positively influence the organic food consumption [32], [33] & [34].

Significant relationship also observed between product related factors and consumption of organic food. Product related factors mainly related to quality parameters. And it was reported that after health, high quality is the most important attribute to consume organic food for many of the consumers [4]. As many of the studies concluded, a positive correlation is observed between the health consciousness and organic food consumption [16], [26], [25], [15] & [31]. Consumers in general want to consume organic food for their better health. Positive and significant correlation also observed between the variable environmental consciousness and organic food consumption in the present study. This is further supported by many other findings [16], [4], [26] & [25]. Furthermore, a study carried out in Germany concluded that after the health consciousness, environmental consciousness is the second biggest attribute which move the consumers towards the organic food consumption [35].

According to the results of the present study, number of members in the family negatively correlated with organic food consumption. The results are in accordance with few studies carried out in the past but on the other hand contradicted with few other studies. Studies reported that regular consumers of organic food are with fewer children and small family size [36] & [25]. In contrast, some other studies indicated that consumers with large household size are more

likely to buy and consume organic food [37], [38] & [39].

Monthly family income showed positive significant relationship with organic food consumption. The same result was reported in past studies [16], [25], [26] & [15]. Further, another study reported that in general household income has a significant correlation with the organic food purchase and found that the proportion of people consuming organic food has been rise with the increase in income [40].

With respect to the age, there were no any significant relationship occurred. The findings of the present study are in accordance with few past findings [16] & [26], whereas contradicted with some other findings. One of the past study reported that organic food consumption does not differ across age categories [39]. On the other hand, another study reported that organic food consumers are usually lesser than 45 years of age category [25].

A multiple regression analysis was carried out to find out the amount of contribution made by the independent variables in explaining the variation in the dependent variable; organic food consumption. The results of the analysis have been furnished in Table 4.

The data presented in Table 4 revealed that the variable consumer motivation had positive and high significant relationship with organic food consumption whereas household members had negative, significant relationship with organic food consumption. However, remaining variables, age and monthly income did not show any relationship with the organic food consumption

The value of co-efficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.797$) indicates that all four variables together explain 79.7 percent of variation in the organic food consumption. Since 79.7 percent of variation could be explained by the present study by four variables. It implies that there are other undefined variable contributing to the variation not included in the present study. The 'F' value was found to be significant at 0.01 level of probability.

CONCLUSIONS

It is general that change in food consumption pattern also occurred during urbanization process due to various reasons. So, knowledge on urban food consumption pattern is a needed one to

predict future development in the food production and marketing. The current study on organic food consumption pattern was carried out with the help of questionnaires directed to randomly selected consumers of three urban areas in Batticaloa district.

The study concluded that, organic food consumption had significant relationship with consumer knowledge, consumer perception, consumer motivation, product related factors like quality, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, number of household members and monthly family income. Study also revealed that low accessibility, lack of time to look for organic food, and mistrust towards organic food are the main barriers towards the consumption of organic food among the consumers. Thøgersen (2007) indicates that even among the people who had favourable attitudes towards organic food, uncertainty towards organic food may reduce the likeliness to purchase. Providing the consumers with extra information about production and control processes of organic food may assist to reduce the uncertainty and may also help to increase the knowledge. Organic food sectors and marketers could focus on promoting the benefits and accessibility of organic foods to the general public.

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